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MEMORANDUM FOR : Deputy Director (Research)

SUBJECT : Discussion of Air Force Versus Agency Operation of Project OXCART

REFERENCE : Document Dated 14 October 1960; Subject: "Organization and Delineation of Responsibilities--Project OXCART" (OXC-0321)

1. Discussion of the relative merits of locating OXCART operational control in the Air Force as opposed to CIA is at once both extremely difficult and disturbingly simple. The difficulties are associated with sorting out from nearly seven years of experience in Project IDEALIST the most salient features forming the background of that essentially successful joint Air Force-Agency operation. The disturbing simplicity comes from the same Project IDEALIST experience which confirms the belief that CIA did not apply any magic formula in devising a workable arrangement with the Air Force in the conduct of that Project. The whole picture is further complicated by the fact that there is in existence at the present time a basic document referred to above, which was signed nearly two years ago by Mr. Dulles as DCI and the then Chief of Air Staff, General Thomas D. White, agreeing to retention of operational control for Project OXCART by this Agency in accordance with the salutary experience gained in Project IDEALIST. The critical paragraphs of the referenced document read as follows:

"3. b. The Project Headquarters will be responsible for any continued research and development, operational planning, and the direction and control of activities in the final operational phase of the Project when overflights are being launched.

"4. c. The third phase will be that of active operations. This phase follows the decision as to operational readiness. The final decision as to execution and timing of actual overflight missions shall rest jointly with the CIA and the USAF, subject to such guidance as may be received from higher authority, and in accordance with notification, coordination, and support procedures employed in Project OILSTONE.\* The line of command shall be direct between operational units and the CIA."

\*Project OILSTONE is the Air Force code name for IDEALIST.

2. It is worthy of note that the signatures of General White and Mr. Dulles on the reference represent the culmination of careful discussions between elements of the Development Projects Division and the OXCART liaison office in USAF Headquarters, which in turn reflected the views of USAF operational elements up to and including the Chief of Air Staff. While we do not argue that the arrangements established by the reference cannot be changed merely because they have previously been agreed to, we do feel that it is worth considering that the conclusions of two years ago wherein operational control was vested in the Agency for OXCART deserve careful restudy at this time.

3. Basic to the consideration of where operational control should lie seems to us to be the status of United States policy with regard to the conduct of overflights of denied areas, particularly the USSR and the Soviet Bloc. To our knowledge there has been no formal indication that the United States Government is prepared to accept the risks inherent in having such overflights conducted by the military arm. Assuming for a moment then that it is safe to conclude that CIA sponsorship as opposed to that of the Air Force offers desirable political benefits to the present Administration, let us proceed to identify as well as we can those advantages and disadvantages inherent in continuation of the presently agreed arrangements which places operational responsibility in CIA.

4. PERSONNEL SELECTION METHODS. We should like to review briefly here the manner in which Air Force officers and enlisted men are acquired from USAF for duty with Project OXCART. In the first place the top command elements in the OXCART field detachment were all selected on a personal basis by CINCSAC. He has personally nominated from his own wide acquaintance in SAC eleven key officers who form the operations cadre in the detachment. These include the Detachment Commander, the Director and Deputy Director of Operations, the Director of Materiel, and the principal members of the Operations Staff, including four senior Operations Flight Planners and three Navigation Flight Planners. All of these officers are key men with many years of combat and reconnaissance experience in USAF, beginning with the Detachment Commander, who was the senior reconnaissance officer in SAC prior to being detailed to this Agency. For the balance of the Air Force complement of the Detachment and its supporting elements, Air Force officers on detail to IPD did the bulk of the detachment manpower planning for the OXCART Project. It was they who established the criteria from a professional standpoint in accordance with the highest Air Force standards. Nominations for the Project are solicited by IPD through the Agency's Military Personnel Division, which translates them into requisitions levied upon a Special Projects Personnel Section in Air Force, responsive to the OXCART liaison office in USAF Headquarters. The Special Projects Personnel Section directs Air Force commands to nominate individuals for a highly classified special assignment without defining its exact nature. Written instructions go to the commands, insisting that "only the best qualified candidates be nominated". Eventual nominees are reported to MPD in CIA, which conducts its own

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screening of applicants based upon experience with the type of operation conducted in DPD in the past. One out of three nominees in the airman ranks received by MMFD under this system is screened out before the list reaches this Staff. Additional screening is conducted by the DPD Personnel Section, in close consultation with experienced Air Force detailees in the Division. Of the applicants finally put in process, one out of four is proven less than acceptable, either as a result of thorough security checks, polygraph, or medical examinations. All military nominees complete psychiatric tests upon entry into DPD and Project OXCART, and psychiatric approval may be required if the written test warrants it in the opinion of the Medical Staff. The Agency, therefore, is applying its own rigid entrance requirements to the already select list of nominees made available to us by USAF. It is a generally fair statement to say that in the security and medical areas CIA adheres to stricter requirements than would be the case were Project OXCART to be staffed by Air Force in accordance with their criteria. It is worthy of noting, for example, that the officer promotion rate among Air Force detailees to DPD is considerably higher than average within the Service. In nearly five years, for example, only one officer among the many detailed to DPD has failed a promotion after entering the primary zone of consideration. In summary on this point then, the evidence suggests that officers and airmen currently concerned with Project OXCART, both in Headquarters and the field, are nominated, screened, and selected in accordance with the highest standards of the United States Air Force and CIA.

5. UNITARY OPERATIONS CONTROL. It seems to us that one of the most persuasive arguments for the retention of operations control in this Agency is that by doing so we will have ensured not only a desirable close working relationship between research and development on the one hand and actual flight operations on the other, but in addition we will have taken advantage of an extremely shortened command line, which in the language of the referenced document "shall be direct between operational units and the CIA". As we now envision it, this direct channel which avoids cumbersome DOD mechanisms would flow for mission approvals direct from the White House to the Director of Central Intelligence, thence to the Deputy Director (Research), and onward to the field unit through the Chief, Special Projects Division and the Control Center in the Division. Unless and until one has become enmeshed in the complexities of DOD policy and program review and approvals mechanisms, he cannot fully appreciate the tremendous advantages of direct and uncontaminated command communications. It is a truism to point out that this shortened channel offers one of the principal benefits to be derived from Agency operations control: maximum security of the mission. As a separate but closely related benefit, preservation of Agency control offers the White House the option of deniability to a degree not present should the enterprise be undertaken and operated under military aegis. Unitary operations control as conducted in the Agency offers another useful and meaningful dividend in the form of reduced manpower required to plan, support, and conduct the operational mission, both in Headquarters and in the field. Actual operations planning for the entire OXCART Program will be

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accomplished by a total of about thirty officers, split almost evenly between Washington and the field detachment. This figure is ridiculously low when plotted against a comparable standard Air Force operation, and is made possible only through minimizing of unnecessary and bureaucratic procedures, shortened command lines, and timely Air Force support in areas ancillary to operations; i.e., weather forecasting, communications systems, and tanker support. The caliber of this assistance is not only due to personalized support from highest Air Force command levels but by the unusually high priority granted the Project by the USAF itself. The biggest bonus of all, we feel, is that unitary control offers tremendous advantages in promptly relating the operations people to those responsible for research and development at the same piece of real estate and under the same roof. Since the so-called R&D phase will overlap by months or possibly even years the inception of the operations phase, there will need to be a continuous interface between developers and users. In the Air Force, with its multitude of related but separate commands, operators would most certainly be obliged to report their conclusions and recommendations to developers only after various levels of review had been accomplished, thus increasing the number of time-consuming decisions required.

6. UNITARY PROJECT MANAGEMENT. Anything that has thus far been said about the desirable aspects of unitary operations control it seems to us apply with equal force to over-all project management, from inception to delivery of the end product.

Given the strong language of the President's charge to the Director in his 17 January letter, establishing Mr. McCone without a doubt as the central focal point in the United States Government for all intelligence activities, as well as his own expressed desire to retain mission planning responsibility for OXCART in the Agency, it seems to us that the present well-exercised machinery for blending COMOR requirements, Agency development and operations responsibility, and NPIC handling of the end product offers the greatest assurance that the Director will at all times be the first to know the most about the OXCART intelligence product.

Contrast, if you will, the situation existing today in the SAMOS Program with that of Project CORONA as being an analogous situation to that which might exist were this present COMOR/CIA/NPIC combination to be disturbed. As an Agency, we know little or nothing about target programming for SAMOS. We know only a little more about launch parameters, orbital characteristics, or recovery techniques. End product processing is also not scheduled to be done at NPIC but at Westover Air Force Base. In the event of a successful SAMOS shot, the DCI must rely upon the DOD to tell him what transpired, what was covered in response to which requirements, and he has no immediate and direct access to a properly interpreted end product as he does in CORONA and IDEALIST at the present time.



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Unitary management of the OXCART reconnaissance capability, whereby the entire cycle of funding, contracting, research and development, flight testing, operations or collection and end product processing all come under one roof, appears even on the surface to be so attractive in support of the Director's given responsibilities as to be well nigh irresistible. Should the Air Force be inserted only in the operations phase, it seems obvious that any credit for a successful operation would in the first instance fall to them; in the event it should not be successful, Air Force could argue that it was beyond redemption by the time they moved in. We submit that at all levels USAF operational inputs are receiving primary consideration and that from our experience, they see the benefits to the entire intelligence effort which are the by-product of the system established in Project IDEALIST some years ago.

7. SECURITY. One very major benefit derived from single source control of OXCART is the tested Agency security system. It is obvious that any move to split responsibilities between the Agency and the Air Force at the operational threshold will automatically necessitate more clearances of USAF personnel. Under the present system of tight control in a single security complex, Air Force directs support and assistance from its various commands with minimum spread of knowledge. Were they to become wholly responsible for operations, they can be expected to follow their normal in-house practice of more fully informing commands participating in the effort.

USAF respect for Agency security standards and practices is reflected in their wide acceptance of the [REDACTED] system and their stated desire to enlarge it to encompass other sensitive programs. Our experience over the years has been that in Air Force operations management of their own programs in reconnaissance they do not exercise the same degree of security hold-down that we have traditionally employed.

In the field of physical security, both the Air Force and we agreed early in our joint relationship that reliance should be placed on CIA's assets. The Agency necessarily exacts higher professional standards in its security staff than does the Air Force Provost Marshal, plagued as the latter is by constant rotation and generally low skill levels among available airmen, few of whom voluntarily choose the field of physical security. Any decision to place the OXCART Area under exclusive Air Force control would necessitate reliance upon traditional USAF Provost Marshal forces with what we feel is a lessening of effective security control.

8. SUMMARY. Much has already been said about what we regard as the inevitable pressures that would result on development were operational control to revert to Air Force in OXCART. In our view this continues to be a concern,

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and one which can only deteriorate with the passage of time, since development will not end with the onset of operations. It also seems highly unlikely that mission planning responsibility can be retained by the Agency while yielding operational control to the Air Force, since there is such a close interaction between the two. As we have said, under the presently approved definition of responsibilities between CIA and the Air Force set forth in the reference, those wholly desirable contributions which must be made by USAF if the program is to succeed are already provided for. It will be the best qualified Air Force operations officers who will be exercising operational control over OXCART. In our opinion the only tangible difference will be that they will be responsive in the first instance to Agency management and objectives, which after all could not long continue to be so different from those of the Air Force that there is much to be gained in complicating an already smoothly functioning relationship by splitting the program in its most critical phase. On these facts it seems wise to rest our case.

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Colonel, USAF  
Acting Chief, DPD

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